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ABSTRACT

Sixteen pieces of legislation affecting public education in Georgia were passed by the General Assembly in the 1997 session. Eleven of the 16 are notable, and are discussed in this article. They include: (1) House Bill 567, the School Safety Act of 1997, which makes juvenile court records available to the schools and establishes alternative schools; (2) House Bill 180, Requirements for Transferring Students, which includes the exchange of information about student status in grade 7 or higher; (3) House Bill 681, the Teenage Driver Responsibility Act, which includes release of student information from the school system to the Department of Public Safety; (4) House Bill 383, Middle School Requirements, with an amendment allowing school security personnel to carry weapons; (5) House Bill 214, Flag Instruction; (6) Senate Bill 50, After School Program for Middle School Age Children; (7) Senate Resolution 72, a Driver Education Study Committee; (8) Senate Bill 25, State Superintendent Qualifications; (9) House Bill 165, Homestead Option Sales Tax; (10) Senate Bill 16, Plains High School Named Official State School; and (11) House Resolution 362, Civic Day Proclaimed. Education bills that are still under consideration can be grouped into the following categories: accountability, student attendance, certification requirements, charter schools, school choice, curriculum funding and quality-based education, school safety and the student code of conduct, home schooling, classroom size, taxation, and transportation. Georgia, in spite of recent educational improvements, still lags behind on a number of national comparisons. The state's educational standing in the future will have much to do with its continued success in boosting achievement of poor children who have usually not been served well by the schools they attend. (SLD)

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Education Policy in Georgia: A Review of Legislation in the 1997 General Assembly

Leslie T. Fenwick, Ph.D.

Introduction

In the spring of 1989, then-governor of Arkansas Bill Clinton (a recognized "education governor"), led the nation's charge to reform the American public K-12 educational system and to revitalize the issue of education as a national agenda item. The Clinton-led Governor's Conference, held in Charlottesville, Virginia, laid the foundation for what would become Goals 2000: The Educate America Act and, later, America 2000, with its eight national education goals.

In his January 1997 State of the Union Address President Clinton congratulated Governor Zell Mill another "education governor," on his HOPE scholarship initiative and recognized his efforts as a successful model for increasing statewide college attendance. In April 1997 in Atlanta, Georgia, U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley delivered the nationally televised State of Education Address.

With these two events Georgia, a state historically plagued by low education indicators, entered the last few years of this century identified as an "education state on the move." Indeed, although Georgia continues to lag on several education indices, it was ranked fourth in a recent national survey of public schools that praised the state's efforts to improve educational outcomes. Georgia was lauded for its lottery-funded HOPE scholarship, its pre-K program, upgrading school technology, eliminating the general track high school diploma, raising SAT scores, boosting the number of students taking college entrance exams, increasing the number of students taking and passing the AP tests, and increasing teacher pay. Governor Zell Miller summarized the

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significance of the state's metamorphosis saying "It's an incredible change for this state, for Georgia, to become a model."[1]

Georgia's Education Legislation

Numerous issues related to education and the schools received consideration by the 1997 Georgia legislature. Some legislative initiatives were characterized by the local press and pundits as "largely symbolic," "politically expedient," "unusual" and even "silly". These included: Senate Bill 51 (Abernathy 38), which passed the Senate and is awaiting action by the Committee of the Second Chamber, and seeks to *ban Ebonics instruction in the schools;* House Bill 214 (Birdsong 123, Smith 175, Roberts 162 and others), which passed and has been signed by the governor, and *requires instruction in the use and display of the U.S. flag;* House Bill 209 (Johnston 81, Lakely 105 and Irvin 45), which was rejected but sought to mandate *pubic display of a teacher's credentials in his/her classroom* and Senate Bill 305 (Abernathy 38), which is active and awaiting action by the Committee of the Chamber of Introduction, and *supports enforcement of a uniform student dress code.* With regard to this latter issue, education research does *not* support the popular notion that uniforms reduce school discipline problems and boost academic achievement, metro area schools have adopted them, nonetheless. During the 1991-92 school year, only four metro schools had uniforms. Today, more than half of the Atlanta Public School's 97 schools have adopted them. They are worn in 22 of DeKalb County's 108 schools, in 12 of Fulton County's 60 schools and at 1 Cobb County School. And they are being tried at 1 Marietta School, and 3 schools in Clayton County. [2]

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1 Diane Loupe, "State Public Schools Praised for Scoring High in U.S. Survey," *Atlanta Journal/Constitution*, 17 January 1997, 3.

2 Gail Towns, "Most Definitely Trendy, Uniforms the Norm in Many Area Schools," *Atlanta Journal/Constitution*, 19 October 1996, 2.

Other bills articulated more pragmatic concerns. Senate Bill 293, which remains active and awaits action by the Committee of the Second Chamber, (Abernathy 38) supported the *installation of passenger seat belts in schools buses* (as of January 1997, State Department of Education statistics indicated that no student has been killed in school bus in 14 years; however, during 1994-95 there were 830 crashes involving public buses and 515 students were injured). Senate Bill 106 (Taylor 12, Marable 52 and Hooks 14), attempted to *raise the compulsory school attendance ages in the state from 7-16 years of age to 7-18 years of age;;* a floor amendment to the bill puts the mandatory attendance age at 17, up from 16. Senate Bill 60 (James 35) which recommended a formula for *maximum class sizes in grades K-2*. Senate Bill 50 (Oliver 42, Hooks 14 and Harbison 15) supported the institution of *after school programs for middle school children*, to be operated by the Office of School Readiness. Senate Bill 85 (James 35) provided that all public middle and high schools make available to eligible students a *test taking skills course*, designed to offer an opportunity for review and practice for the SAT, other standardized tests, and mandatory assessments. Each of the above remains active and awaiting action by appropriate committee.

House Bill 180 (Hecht 97) instituted *requirements for transferring students*.. The bill, which passed the General Assembly and was signed by the governor, imposes new requirements on students transferring into a school in grade 7 or higher and on the school receiving the student. It provides that a transferring student applying for admission to a grade higher than the sixth grade shall, as a prerequisite to admission, present a certified copy of his or her academic transcripts and disciplinary record from the school previously attended. This bill adds additional information for transferring students in grades above six to that which schools customarily receive. It would alert receiving school personnel if a transferring student had been adjudicated guilty of a designated felony or was

under suspension or expulsion from another school. It authorizes schools to dismiss ineligible students from enrollment until such time as they become eligible.

House Bill 681 (Walker 141) the *Teen Age Driver Responsibility Act*, which effective July 1, 1997, requires the State Department of Education to provide the Department of Public Safety enrollment, attendance, and suspension information regarding minors 15-17 years of age. Previously issued permits or licenses are to be suspended for minors whose records indicate that they have dropped out of school, been suspended from school, or who have been truant. Related to this is Senate Resolution 72 (Johnson 2, Penn 31 and James 35), created a Joint Driver Education Study Committee to conduct a study of steps to improve the education of young drivers through the reintroduction and implementation of driver's education programs in Georgia. Senate Bill 16 (Hooks 14) which *designated Plains High School, attended by former President Jimmy Carter, as the Official Georgia state school*.

Every year, the Phi Delta Kappan (PDK) publishes the results of their commissioned Gallup Poll. " Public's Attitudes Toward Education". This year, the perennial concerns about safety and drop out rates surfaced. Other high profile educational topics included charter schools, school choice, home schooling, character/values education, accountability/testing, and qualifications for educators/educational administrators. Georgia's legislative initiatives reflected the national dialogue as well as the legislative activity of other states.

School Safety and Alternative Schools

With regard to providing safe school environments, the Georgia legislature created the School Safety Act of 1997. This act, initially House Bill 567 (Porter 143 Taylor 134 and others), which passed and has been signed by the governor, stipulates that the superior court provide written notice of a child's (aged 13-17)

conviction of a felony to the school superintendent, thus making juvenile court records available to school personnel. Specifically, the act provides that the local school superintendent inform administrators and teachers at the school which the student is enrolled or plans to be enrolled. Additionally, the School Safety Act indicates that "for those students violating the student code of conduct, it is preferable to reassign them to in-school suspension programs or alternative educational settings rather than to expel such students from school." Sections of the code authorize the State Board of Education to create an alternative schools program for students in grades 6-12 who violate the student code and for any local board to establish such a school for the "sole purpose of providing a *separate educational program* for students who violate the student code of conduct." The bill goes on to limit the liability of teachers who take disciplinary action against students.

The School Safety Act of 1997 has been touted as the Georgia legislature's get tough measure aimed at creating a "code of conduct" for the state's 1.3 million public school students. The "code of conduct," embedded in the act (and initially proposed as a separate bill, Senate Bill 92 sponsored by Abernathy 38, Taylor 12 and Walker 22) demands that students, among other things, show respect for authority and school property, attend school and report on time, refrain from using obscene language, drugs, alcohol, weapons, and from engaging in verbally or physically abusive activity. Local school systems are required to develop specific "code of conduct" policies or risk losing funding. Senate Bill 92 remains active and awaiting action by the Committee of the Second Chamber.

Presently, 123 alternative school programs, operating with states funds, are in existence in the state through the Crossroads Alternative School Program. Local districts operate numerous other alternative schools. Disturbingly, although the state's population of African American students is 37.5%, 54.1% of

alternative school enrollment is African American. White students comprise 58% of the state's public school student population and 43.6% of the alternative school population. (Georgia does not deviate from national statistics in this regard). With regard to gender, 69.2% of alternative student population is male. Dramatic increases have occurred in the number of female students in these settings; for Georgia the percentage is 30.8. [3] Further indicating the commitment to police Georgia's schools, was a floor amendment to HB 383 which authorized school security personnel to carry weapons. The act became effective July 1, 1997.

Though statistics on drop out rates are notorious for their inaccuracy, in national comparisons, Georgia repeatedly surfaces as a state with a high drop out rates. The previously mentioned SB 60 and HB 681 (passed and signed by the governor) constituted Georgia legislators aim to create disincentives for school drop outs. Georgia students must attend school until their seventeenth birthday and risk losing driver's license permits should they be truant or suspended from school.

Charter Schools

With regard to charter schools, school choice, home schooling, character/values education, accountability/testing, and qualifications for state school superintendents, Georgia legislators created the delineated legislation. Senate Bill 70 (Land 16, Scott 36 and Tanksle 132), The Charter School Act of 1997 replaced the charter school statute further outlining the criteria for charter school status. A unique aspect of Georgia's charter legislation allows independent groups such as foundations or motivated parents to start a tax supported charter

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3 Georgia Department of Education 1996-1997 Report.

4. Georgia School Superintendent Association, *Reports From the Capitol*, 31 March 1997.

5. Jane van Galen and Mary Anne Pitman, Home Schooling: Political, Historical, and Pedagogical Perspectives, New York: Jossey Bass Publishers, 1991.

groups such as foundations or motivated parents to start a tax supported charter school with school board approval. Previously, the state allowed only existing public schools to become charter schools. Georgia heretofore had been designated a weak charter law state. Strong charter laws grant a great deal of financial and legal autonomy and automatic freedom from state and local rules. Weak charter laws are those that keep charter schools clearly accountable within the structure of public education. The language of HB 70, which remains active and awaiting action by the Committee of the Second Chamber, shifts Georgia's designation as weak to moderately strong. There are approximately 482 charter schools nationally. California tops the list with 109 charter schools. Illinois has one. Georgia has 13 charter schools, distributed in Cobb, Chatham, Griffin-Spaulding, Bartow, Forsyth and DeKalb counties and Cartersville City. Cartersville is one of the only school system's in the nation that is a charter school district. House Bill 354 (Ashe 46, Smith 175, Coleman 80 and others), a revision to the Act, allows an institution of higher learning which grants degrees in teacher education to petition to establish a charter school. HB 354 remains active and awaiting action by the Committee of the Chamber of Introduction.

School Choice

Georgia's Public School Choice Act of 1997 was introduced via House Bill 121 (Smith 175). This Act remains active and awaiting action by the Committee of the Chamber of Introduction. HB 121 defines the parameters of school choice for the state. It provides that an established public school choice program enable any student to attend a school within a school system in which the student does not reside, provided that the transfer by the student would not adversely affect the desegregation of either system. School systems are authorized to accept and enroll students who are nonresidents of such system at no charge to such students for tuition or fees. A local board that elects to admit nonresident

resolution, specify standards for acceptance and rejections of applications. Such standards may include the capacity of a program, class, grade level, or school building and shall insure random access. Students may not be selected on the basis of academic achievement, athletic ability, disabling condition, English proficiency, or previous disciplinary proceedings.[4]

Home Schooling

Home schooling is an issue that has gained national and statewide currency, particularly as the number of home-schooled children continues to grow. According to Van Galen (1991) home schooling in the nineties"is a small but vigorous movement serving about 1% of the total school age population."[5] In Georgia there are 10,441 home study progams serving 17,481 students (about 1.3% of the state's total public school population).[6] Significant percentages of the home schooled are now college bound, raising concerns about college GPA entrance requirements and scholarship eligibility. A major concern has been determining the value of a grade: Is an "A," assigned by a parent who home schools equivalent to an "A" assigned by the local public school teacher? Georgia high school graduates with a 3.0 average or above are eligible for HOPE grants covering tuition, fees, and a book allowance at the state's public colleges and universities. House Bill 90 (Pinholster 15 and Crews 78) allows for the granting of HOPE scholarships to students in home study programs provided they score 1150 or more on the SAT, pass the currently required GED, and have a final grade average of at least an 80 numeric average. The original bill had specified a

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6 Georgia Department of Education 1996-1997 Report.

7. Leslie Fenwick, "You Still Need to Be an Educator to Become a Superintendent: A Review of 50 States' Statutes" unpublished manuscript, June 1997.

8. Jonathan Kozol, Savage Inequalities, New York: Crown Publishers, 1991.

9. Georgia School Superintendents Association, *Noteworthy: Contemporary Issues about Georgia 's Public Education*, 10 April 1997.

or guardians who teach their child at home must have at least a baccalaureate degree , the current requirement is a high school diploma or GED; 2) the home study instructor write a semiannual progress assessment report (the current requirement is annually); 3) a teacher holding a valid Georgia teaching certificate and selected by the parent or guardian shall evaluate the student's educational progress at the end of each school year; and the teacher shall submit a written evaluation to the local school superintendent. If a student is found to be deficient either through standardized testing or through the teacher evaluation, the home school instructor must provide remedial instruction, and the home study program shall be on probation for one year. [6] The bill remains active and awaits action by the Committee of the Chamber of Introduction.

Character/Values Education

Teen pregnancy rates, incidents of school violence, increasing numbers of absentee parents, and the declining role of religious institutions (churches, synagogues, temples, etc.) in the socialization of children have provided fertile ground for the rising interest in character/values education. The character education movement which had its heyday in the late 1800's and early 1900's, resurfaced in the 1980's with such publications as E.D. Hirsch's Cultural Literacy, Allan Bloom's The Closing of the American Mind, and William Bennett's Book of Virtues. In this milieu, politicians, business leaders, educators, and parents created the fervor for a "return to basic education and traditional values." Popular perception seems to hold that these have been lost in new age curricula. Increasingly, character/values education is becoming a curriculum staple, palatable to most school constituencies. Georgia is no different from the rest of the nation in this sentiment. Indeed, a 1997 National School Boards Association report indicates that 45% of the nation's approximately 16,000 school districts offer character education.

House Bill 393 (Epps 131, Taylor 134, Porter 143 and others) provides that the State Board of Education develop by the start of the 1997-98 school year a comprehensive character education program for levels K-12. The program is to focus on the student's development of character traits such as courage, patriotism, citizenship, respect for others, tolerance, punctuality, school pride, cheerfulness, virtue, loyalty, and the like. "Respect for the creator," was added to by floor amendment in the House, sparking some controversy. The bill passed and has been signed by the governor.

To date, educational research data show that children, like the adults they mimic, may know moral lessons and understand desirable character traits and values. However, too often there is little correspondence between knowing what is "right" and doing what is "right". The real challenge of this curriculum, as with others, is appropriate application in real life situations.

Science and Social Studies Curricula

House Bill 547 (Joyce 1, Mills, Crews 78 and others) addresses yet another curriculum issue, one that re-opens the evolution-creation debate. HB 547: Origins of Life and Living Things provides that the General Assembly "finds a purpose of science education is to teach the skills of objective scientific inquiry; that precise and clear definitions are essential for learning to take place; that current science textbooks fail to use precise definitions pertaining to evolutionary theory and omit mention of problems not solved by current evolutionary theory; and that the potential for indoctrination exists when information is withheld from students." A provision of the bill gives teachers the right, as part of any science curriculum, concerning the origins of life and living things, including the origins of humankind, to present and critique any and all scientific theories about such origins and all facts thereof. The bill, which remains active and awaits action by the Committee of the Chamber of Introduction, requires that teachers

be encouraged to make distinctions between philosophical materialism and authentic science and that teachers be encouraged to include unanswered questions and unsolved problems in their presentations of the origins of life and living things.

Although it no longer attracts the spectacle of a Scopes Monkey Trial, this issue is still quietly alive and well in many of the nation's 16,000 school districts, particularly with the growing influence of the religious right.

House Resolution 362 (McBee 88, Taylor 134, Porter 143 and others) directs the State Board of Education to designate a "Civics Day" in the schools of Georgia to coincide with the holding of general and municipal elections each October.

Testing/Assessment

Since the 1980's educational accountability has increasingly become a part of the educator's and legislator's lexicon. Two bills which address testing/assessment benchmarks were introduced to the Georgia legislature and assigned to the Education Committee. House Bill 226 (Buckner 95) provides that the curriculum adopted by each local board include the teaching of concepts that are representative of the standardized student assessments required by law. This legislation appears to be reflective of a broader dialogue and trend in education, curriculum alignment - matching curricular content and objectives with standardized test content, thus improving student's likelihood of testing success. HB 226, mandates that certain curricular concepts be adopted by local boards.

House Bill 276 (Trense 44), which remains active and awaits action by the Committee of the Chamber of Introduction, provides that no curriculum based assessments be administered except in grade 11 for graduation purposes. HB 276 limits the use of curriculum based assessments; other current assessment requirements remain unaffected.

Qualifications for State Superintendents

State governance of the public elementary and secondary schools in Georgia has been hotly debated over the past several years. One of the issues has been the method of selection of the State Superintendent of Schools. Several states have changed state statutes regarding the qualifications of local school superintendents. Although the majority of states continue to stipulate educational credentials (especially, at least 3 years in K-12 teaching and coursework in educational administration) there are some which have stricken that requirement, thus permitting noneducators access to the superintendency.[7] This issue has been raised in Georgia, not only with regard to minimal qualifications for local school superintendents, but also with regard to state school superintendents. Senate Bill 25 (Oliver 42, Egan 40 and Taylor 12)) permits noneducators to run for the state superintendency. The bill which passed and has been signed by the governor, removes the requirements that the state superintendent have a 5 year college degree and 3 years of teaching experience. With regard to academic requirements, individuals seeking the office now need only to have a four year college degree. It is interesting to note that while legislators rush to stiffen academic standards for students, standards for educational leaders are being more weakly defined.

Remedial Education Programs

Two bills impacting programs designed to assist underachieving students were introduced in the Georgia legislature. Senate Bill 332 (Brush 24) examined remedial education program eligibility. The bill, assigned to the Senate Education Committee, provides that the grade levels eligible for participation in the Remedial Education Program be changed from two through 5 and nine through twelve to grades six through twelve. Students enrolled in such programs in the elementary grades would be impacted, as the lower grades of

two through five would be dealt out of the Remedial Education Program; grades six through eight would be added. Ultimately fewer grades and students would be served by such changes. Disproportionately high percentages of African American, non-English speaking, and poor students are assigned to these programs. It will be important to monitor this bill. Will educational opportunity for these children increase or decrease? One resounding message from educational research is that when such programs become unavailable opportunities for underserved groups decrease. [8] Additionally, education data are clear that intervention/remediation at the earliest grades is most beneficial.

Introduced in February and assigned to the Education Committee, House Bill 729 (Porter 143, Taylor 134, Purcell 147 and others) recommends changes in the funding formula for three grant programs - the Special Instructional Assistance Program (SIA), the In-School Suspension Program, and the Program for Limited-English-Proficient Students. For all three programs, the bill provides that "for the fiscal year beginning on July 1, 1998, and each fifth fiscal year thereafter, the amount of funds appropriated and allocated for this program shall be based upon the documented number of students actually needing such services. In other fiscal years, the amount of funds appropriated and allocated for this program shall be based on the actual count of students served during the preceding fiscal year."[9] The bill also proposes that each local school system shall annually report by grade level the number of eligible students, the number of students served, the types of services provided, and the average achievement of students served in each of the programs. The bill remains active and awaits action by the Committee of the Chamber of Introduction.

A major concern of HB 729 is the SIA program, the program is aimed at students in K-3 whose developmental skills are in the lowest 30 percent for their age group. With this legislation, local school officials will have to prove every

student in the specially funded programs actually qualifies for the extra help or risk losing their share of the $87.8 million in state funds. The impetus for examination of SIA came from Governor Miller who in a letter to State Board of Education Chairman Johnny Isakson indicated his concern about the rate of increase in funding for the SIA for fiscal year 1998 (from $87 million to $105 million). One hundred fourteen of Georgia's 180 school systems had more than 30% of their kindergartners enrolled in SIA, thus raising questions about placement criteria and program effectiveness.[10]

Funding

Governor Zell Miller's $11.8 billion state budget was approved by the Georgia legislature. As in previous years, significant expenditures were related to education. In an ambitious bid to make Georgia salaries for teachers and university faculty the highest in the Southeast, Miller won a 6 percent pay raise for public educators for the third consecutive year. Two of the governor's hallmark projects - the HOPE scholarship and pre-kindergarten for four year olds - were expanded. The HOPE scholarship, which has been distinguished as a national model and is credited with contributing to Georgia's status as the state with the fastest growing African American college enrollment (a 99.8% increase from 21,824 in 1986 to 43,609 in 1996), was expanded by more than $6.2 million. The budget also includes funding for 60,000 pre-kindergartners, about 3,000 more than the previous year. [11]

Though passed and signed, Governor Zell Miller, using authority granted in recent years, employed the line-item veto to delete numerous items from

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10 Diane Loupe, "Districts Told to Test Slow Learners or Lose Funds," 11 April 1997, 3.
11. Gail Towns, "Black Enrollment at College on Rise," *Atlanta Journal/Constitution*, 11 April 1997, 3.
12 Peter Mantius, "Lawmakers Grant Miller's Education Wishes in Budget," *Atlanta Journal/Constitution*, 13 March 1997.
13. Georgia School Superintendents Association, *Noteworthy*, 10 April 1997.

House Bill 204 (Murphy 18, Coleman 142 and others), the fiscal year 1998 Appropriations Act. Three of the items pertained to K-12 education: vocational equipment for high schools; applied technology lab equipment; and learning logic sites. Of these items, expenditures for vocational education raised significant debate. In a move that raised the ire of the General Assembly (particularly the rural legislators in both chambers), Governor Miller proposed eliminating the vocational education program weight in the Quality Basic Education (QBE) formula, which would eliminate earnings for vocational equipment replacement in favor of a three-student reduction in the student-teacher ratio for regular high school classes. Georgia legislators did not agree with the governor's plan to cut $50 million in vocational labs and use the funds toward reducing high school class sizes to 20 students from 23. They kept the labs and scrapped the new teacher ration, which many viewed as "smoke and mirrors," [12] as no new classes were provided for the smaller classes.

Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) elections were held in Georgia on March 18, 1997. Seventy three of Georgia's 180 school districts offered the proposed one cent sales tax referendum. Sixty seven of the 73 elections were successful.[13]

These elections will produce approximately $2.5 billion for school construction and an additional $1 billion to retire outstanding bonded debt. Atlanta, DeKalb, Fulton, and Gwinnett alone stand to raise, approximately $500 million each, over the next five years for school construction, renovation, and debt retirement. These revenues are particularly noteworthy for a school district like DeKalb County; it is one of the nation's rarities - a majority African American school district that is *not* resource poor and infrastructure weak.

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14 Ibid.

Conclusions

Sixteen pieces of legislation affecting public education in Georgia were passed by the General Assembly in the 1997 session. Eleven of the sixteen are most notable and have been discussed in this article. They include: House Bill 567 (Porter 143), the School Safety Act of 1997; House Bill 180 (Hecht 97), Requirements for Transferring Students; House Bill 681 (Walker 141), The Teen-Age Responsibility Act; House Bill 383 (Ashe 46), Middle School Requirements, and amendment to House Bill 383 authorizing school security personnel to carry weapons; House Bill 214 (Birdsong 123) Flag Instruction; Senate Bill 50 (Oliver 42),After School Program for Middle School Age Children; Senate Resolution 72 (Johnson 2), Driver Education Study Committee; Senate Bill 25, (Oliver 42), State Superintendent Qualifications; House Bill 165, Homestead Option Sales Tax; Senate Bill 16 (Hooks 14, Egan 40, Taylor 12 and others), Plains High School Named as Official State School; and House Resolution 362 (McBee 88), Civics Day Proclaimed.[14]

Those education bills introduced to the chambers of the legislature for consideration, which were subsequently assigned to committees for appropriate action, can be grouped in the following categories: accountability, student attendance, certification requirements, charter schools, school choice, curriculum, funding and QBE, school safety and student code of conduct, home schooling, classroom size, taxation, and transportation.[15]

Georgia, even as an "education state on the move," still lags on a wide range of national comparisons. Students rank well below average in both math and reading sections of the National Assessment of Educational Progress. Only 26% of the state's fourth graders and 13 percent of the eighth graders are at or above the national average in reading and math respectively. Academic

15. Ibid.

standards continue to need to be raised; students need more individualized instruction; the state needs to draft a long-range plan for technology; school funding needs to be increased and equalized; school buildings need to be upgraded; teachers need more and better professional development. [16] Further, Georgia legislators and educators will need to act on data which reveal disheartening racial disparities in educational outcomes for Georgia students. Specific policies will need to be enacted and state-of-the-art practices embraced to remedy these glaring deficiencies. All of these efforts will require that the governor and state legislators continue to support an aggressive educational investment strategy.

Georgia's standing will continue to have much to do with its continued success boosting achievement of poor children who usually are not served well by the schools they attend. The state's prize programs - pre-K and the HOPE scholarship - will continue to be essential for improving educational outcomes for traditionally underserved school communities. To this end, Governor Zell Miller's P-16 Councils, created at the urging of the University System Chancellor Stephen Portch, will be important to monitor. The Councils, whose name stands for pre-school (P) through college (grade 16) are charged with strengthening ties between the various sectors of Georgia's education system with the goal of improving student achievement at all levels. As Chancellor Portch proceeds to toughen college admission standards, P-16 Councils (broad based, voluntary representative groups of educators, community members, business leaders, youth advocate organizations and the like) will have the opportunity to watchdog and influence policies and practices which insure that gains for

16. Elizabeth Schulz, "U.S. Schools Survey," *Education Week*., 13 January 1997.

underrepresented college populations, particularly African Americans, are not undone.

With a strong education governor, Georgia has moved forward. Despite a few missteps and with "miles to go," Georgia has put many promising policies in place and must resist the efforts of some to reverse direction.